

# Governor holds second water conference

Water. It's essential to life, yet it is often not treated as the precious commodity that it is.

Kansas water issues were the topic when more than 500 people came together for the Governor's Conference on the Future of Water in Kansas Oct. 30-31 in Manhattan. The conference was hosted by Kansas State University and the Kansas Water Office.

Growing populations in some areas, combined with climate change, fixed water supplies and a declining Ogallala Aquifer mean that there is an increasing need to determine the economic value of water, said Frank Ward, professor of agricultural economics at New Mexico State University.

Several presentations focused on the Ogallala Aquifer, the vast, shallow underground water table aquifer that lies underneath portions of eight states — Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. Many agricultural producers in western Kansas and other states use water from the Ogallala.

"For agriculture, we combine 'crop production function' developed by agricultural engineers and agronomists with crop budgets developed by agricultural economists to generate 'crop revenue functions,'" said Bill Golden, agricultural economist with K-State

Research and Extension.

"The first inches of applied groundwater are much more valuable than the last inches applied," said Golden, noting that "The implication is, if we save the last inches today and use them in the future as first inches, we might have gains in value and groundwater conservation policy can yield significant future benefits to the producer and rural economies."

Golden, who led a recent study on water use in southwest Kansas, said that over the period 1975-1999, the value of water increased about .4 percent a year. However, because of a combination of drought and high commodity prices, the value has jumped 9.7 percent per year since then.

The study also estimated average value of groundwater to producer net revenue ranged from \$129.03 per acre foot to \$182.17 per acre foot. The estimated average value of groundwater to the rural community, however, as measured by total industry output, ranged from \$644.56 per acre foot to \$920.88 per acre foot. The values varied depending on crop mix, soil type, precipitation, well capacity and economic modeling scenarios.

"The implication is that groundwater is as important to the regional economy as it is to the producer," Golden said.

Another study he cited estimated the value of water in irrigated agriculture ranged from \$12.33 per acre foot to \$2,466.96 per acre foot, with an average value of \$345.37. The value of water for domestic use ranged from \$9.87 per acre foot to \$3,552.43, with an average value of \$715.42. And the value of water in industrial use ranged from \$12.33 per acre foot to \$8,560.36, with an average of \$1,060.79.

A study that looked at water use for various purposes suggested that, accounting for only direct water use, dairies are a relatively high-value user of water, generating more than \$93,000 per acre foot.

Overall, Golden said, agriculture is the high volume, low value water user. He predicted that in 40 to 50 years, western Kansas farm land will generally be used for growing dryland wheat and grazing cattle.

"I'm not usually in favor of more regulation, but something more drastic needs to be done about the diminishing water supply in the Ogallala," said Kansas farmer Jay Garetson, who attended the conference. He is a member of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture.

Garetson credited Gov. Sam Brownback for signing two bills into law this year designed to conserve the state's water supply and extend the life of the Ogallala, but believes more action is needed.

"The bind we're in in the short run is the value of the dollar is trumping our long-term vision," said the Sublette farmer, who grows irrigated corn, irrigated and dryland grain sorghum, irrigated and dryland cotton, dryland wheat and irrigated soybeans. "We've had this elephant in the room for 40 years. The combination of high grain prices and low natural gas prices are crushing the Ogallala Aquifer. The short-term economics are telling us to leave (future generations) with nothing."

"This is one situation where voluntary conservation is akin to unilateral disarmament for farmers who irrigate," Garetson said. "What we need is a common requirement where everyone contributes to the long-term reduction. The way it is now, whoever slows down first, loses."

Because the Ogallala is out of sight, it's also out of mind for many citizens, he said, adding that if the water was rapidly being depleted from a visible lake, action likely would have been taken long ago.

Information on the conference, including individual presentations, is available online at [www.kwo.org/Ogallala/Governors\\_Conference\\_2012/Governors\\_Conference\\_2012.htm](http://www.kwo.org/Ogallala/Governors_Conference_2012/Governors_Conference_2012.htm).

# Railroad bypass open after collapse

COLLAPSE, from Page 1

of the farm cooperative were out of the office Friday and could not be reached.

He said officials were really pleased with the cooperation among all the agencies that responded to the collapse.

"We've had very good cooperation from everyone," he said, "from the facility to all the responders, the surrounding coun-

ties and other agencies."

He said both the Thomas and Logan county sheriff's offices sent deputies down to help with traffic, and Thomas County emergency management Director Susan McMahan brought some equipment down. The state Department of Transportation and Highway Patrol also sent help.

"It's worked out to make it as good as it could be in this situation," he said.

# Energy company warns of phone scam

MidwestEnergy, an energy cooperative based in Hays that supplies natural gas in Oberlin, warned customers this month that a new scam is spreading across the nation, and that people in northwest Kansas need to be aware of it, lest they get taken.

The scam involves either a recording or a person calling your phone. The caller says that you are eligible for an "Obama energy credit," the firm says.

After the scammer gains your trust, he or she will ask for your personal information, such as bank account numbers. More than 50,000 people have been taken advantage of so far, with the scam spreading west from Florida since April.

"We're not aware of any scams targeting any customers in Kansas," said Shana Read, director of communications for Kansas Electric Cooperatives in Topeka. "Given the nationwide reach of this scam, it's prudent to make people aware that it is happening."

If you have any doubts as to whether someone on the phone or otherwise talking to you is involved with the company, said Michael Sadedghi, director of customer service at Midwest, call (800) 222-3121 to speak with a representative and make sure.

"We would never call a customer and demand bank information," he added.

# Oberlin bank purchases three regional branches

The Bank of Oberlin has completed its purchase of three branches of First National Bank, including those in Colby, Bird City and Quinter.

"We're just completing the acquisition, from when we started in April," said Gary Walter, president of The Bank. "We were approved by the (Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.) and the Office of the State Banking Commissioner (to take over) at the close of the business day on Friday (Nov. 16)."

Walter said that customers won't be seeing

much of a change, other than the routing number and name on their checks. Internet and business banking won't be affected, he said.

"The people that were customers of First National are customers of ours," he said, "and the same people that were working at those branches are there still. It's the same location, personnel and telephone number."

For existing customers of The Bank in Colby, however, there will be a change.

"In Colby, we moved from our location at 1290 W. Fourth to 1195 S. Range, to what was

the First National Bank," he said. "We're operating the original on limited hours of 7:30 to 11:30 a.m., but only at the drive-up, and only until this Friday."

Mr. Walter said The Bank will honor First National checks until they can be replaced. With everything involved in the changeover, he said, they're hoping to honor them for 60 days.

"As soon as we can get new checks in peoples hands," he said, "it will make everything easier. We can go longer than 60 days if we need to, but that's our goal."

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